

Massage Therapist



History

Massage has its roots in the far reaches of human history. Rubbing a sore muscle or stroking another person for comfort are natural responses. The first written records that refer to massage date back more than 4,000 years to China. In ancient Greece, Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, wrote, "The physician must be experienced in many things, but most assuredly in rubbing."

Massage comes from both Western and Eastern traditions. Western traditions date back to ancient Greece and Rome. Modern Western massage owes a great deal to the work of Peter Henrik Ling, a 19th-century educator and athlete from Sweden. His approach, which combined hands-on techniques with active movements, became known as Swedish Massage, probably the most common therapeutic massage modality in the West.

Eastern traditions can be traced back to the folk medicine of China and the Ayurvedic medicine of India. Shiatsu, acupressure, reflexology, and many other contemporary techniques have their roots in these sources.

The incorporation of massage into health care was fairly well-established in the 19th century, but those connections decreased through most of the 20th century. A growing body of clinical research on the efficacy and value of massage as part of integrated health care, as well as a rapid acceptance and adoption of use of massage in recent years, has fueled a renewed collaboration between massage therapists and other health care professionals.

Surveys of hospitals, conducted through the American Hospital Association, have shown a rapid increase in use of massage in the hospital setting. Consumer surveys conducted by Opinion Research Corporation, International between 1997 and 2003 saw the number of American adults receiving a massage from a massage therapist each year jump from 8% in 1997 to 21% in 2003.



Occupational Description

The American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) has defined massage and massage therapy as follows:

Massage is manual soft tissue manipulation, and includes holding, causing movement, and/or applying pressure to the body. Manual means by use of hand or body.

Massage therapy is a profession in which the practitioner applies manual techniques, and may apply adjunctive therapies, with the intention of positively affecting the health and well-being of the client.

An increasing body of research shows massage reduces heart rate, can help lower blood pressure, increases blood circulation and lymph flow, relaxes muscles, improves range of motion, and increases endorphins. Recent studies indicate massage enhances the functioning of the immune system. Although therapeutic massage does not increase muscle strength, it can stimulate weak, inactive muscles and, thus, partially compensate for the lack of exercise and inactivity resulting from illness or injury. It also can hasten and lead to a more complete recovery from exercise or injury.



Job Description

Some of the most common types of massage are Swedish massage, deep-tissue massage, Shiatsu-acupressure, neuromuscular, trigger point, and sports massage.

Massage therapy is strenuous work. Practitioners must use correct body mechanics to prevent injury and fatigue. If the therapist travels to give massage, they transport either a massage table or massage chair and all supplies necessary to give a massage. The profession requires good listening skills and the ability to make clients comfortable and relaxed. Massage therapists are usually very satisfied with their profession, because they have a positive impact on clients' health and well being. The vast majority of AMTA members say they went into the profession because they want to help people improve their health.

In addition to the actual massage, massage therapists market their practices, keep financial and client records, maintain supplies and equipment, educate their clients about massage and inform them of any physical irregularities they discover, and work with health insurance companies to receive fees. Practitioners take basic medical histories on clients and discuss with the client their current health. During massage, therapists pay close attention to how the client is responding and discuss levels of massage pressure with the client. They also must be aware of medical conditions that might contraindicate massage and advise clients when massage is not appropriate.



Employment Characteristics

Massage therapists work in many different environments, such as hospitals, physician or chiropractor offices, nursing homes, private practice, pain clinics, resorts, cruise ships, shopping malls, airports, spas, and salons. Some focus exclusively on massage for stress relief and relaxation, while others specialize—pregnancy massage, massage to reduce lymphedema after cancer surgery, massage for pain relief, and sports massage, among other specialties. Approximately 19% of AMTA members report that they work in a medical setting.

Massage therapists may be independent contractors, sole practitioners, or employees. Some travel to clients' homes or to business offices. Onsite chair massage has become a very popular form of massage, because of its convenience of use in a variety of settings, such as corporate offices.

Earnings among massage therapists vary widely, depending on where the therapist practices, their level of experience and whether or not they work full-time as massage therapists. Additional time is spent on practice management, billing, marketing, etc.

Based on 2001 surveys, the median full-time massage income of AMTA members is \$20,000 to \$29,000 per year. However, 43% earn more than \$30,000 annually from their work as massage therapists.



Educational Programs

Minimum entry-level standards for massage therapy training vary greatly, based on state or local requirements, professional association standards, or insurance requirements. State regulatory requirements for massage practice range from a minimum of 300 in-class hours at a recognized massage school to 1,000 in-class hours of massage training in an accredited massage program.

The Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation™ (COMTA™) is recognized by the US Department of Education as a specialized accrediting agency for massage therapy and bodywork programs and institutions. It is the only recognized accrediting agency focused solely on the quality of education for massage therapy. Massage schools and programs may voluntarily seek accreditation by COMTA or may choose some other accreditation or none at all. COMTA accredits massage programs and institutions that offer a minimum training of 600 hours of classroom and clinical instruction, conducted or directly supervised by qualified faculty. Six defined competency requirements must be included in the program curriculum and students must be assessed on having met the competencies.

The American Massage Therapy Association requires its members to have minimum training of 500 hours of classroom instruction from a school accredited by COMTA or that is a school member of AMTA. Its Professional-level members must provide evidence of 48 clock hours of continuing education every 4 years.



Licensure and Certification

Licensure. As of November 2003, 33 states and Washington, DC had passed regulations on massage therapy. Some states license massage therapists, while others have basic standards. Regulation of massage therapy by the states has increased dramatically in recent years, with 21 states having passed regulations between 1990 and 2003.

Certification. The National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (NCBTMB) administers the National Certification Examination in Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork and

certifies massage therapists who pass the examination and maintain their status through continuing education. This examination is now required in some states and municipalities for massage therapists to practice. The examination is an entry-level test and requires that a person has completed a minimum of 500 in-class hours of massage training.

National certification, while growing as a requirement in some civil jurisdictions, is by no means a universal requirement.



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